




IDAHO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

650 W. State Street • P.O. Box 83720 • Boise, ID 83720-0037

208/334-2270 • FAX: 208/334-2632

e-mail: board@osbe.state.id.us

DATE: November 17, 2006

FROM: Laird Stone, President of the State Board of Education 

TO: Superintendents, Special Education Directors, School Board Members

SUBJECT: ***PROGRESS ON IMPROVING BLIND/DEAF EDUCATION***

As the President of the State Board of Education, I want to update you on the Board's work to improve services for deaf and hard of hearing and blind and visually impaired students in Idaho.

No doubt, you've read or heard reports about what may or may not happen concerning deaf and hard of hearing education in our state. I'm hopeful this letter will give you more information on the process and how any changes will affect your students.

Our number one priority is to improve the education of all students with disabilities wherever they live in Idaho. We have been engaged over the last two years in a discussion with many stakeholders about how to accomplish this goal and we appreciate the input we have received as we have considered changes to the current service delivery model.

It is important to the Board that every school district and every IEP team have the ability to choose the environment and services necessary to provide quality deaf and hard of hearing and blind and visually impaired education programs. Currently, only a very limited continuum of services or coordinated approach exists in many districts. It is our intent to expand the opportunities to learn for sensory impaired students wherever they live in our state.

I believe the state has been proactive in striving to meet the needs of these students. However, in many ways, our state has continued to fund only particular communication options and placement options. Recent changes in technology and in our society have resulted in changes in parent and district choices in the education programs that will most effectively meet their students' needs. In order to provide a system that is equitable for students and for districts across the state, the Board is considering changes that need to be made to our current system.

If students are receiving services from your district, it is our hope those services will expand and improve as soon as possible. However, we anticipate no change at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind until at least the fall of 2008. It is our hope to have a new statewide service structure that will be in place 2008 or the next school year. The exact timing of the implementation of a new structure will depend on how quickly we can develop the alternative structure and on approval and funding from the Legislature.

The Board has established two Transition Teams, one for Blind and Visually Impaired and one for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. These Transition Teams include a variety of stakeholders with broad knowledge in deaf and hard of hearing issues and in blind and visually impaired issues.

Both teams also include special education directors, teachers, parents, superintendents and individuals who are deaf and blind themselves.

Just as in academic content areas, to begin a quality reformation, the State Board will also be asking experts in the field to develop and write standards for deaf and hard of hearing and blind and visually impaired education programs. These standards will be available for public comment in 2007. The Transition Teams will use the standards to develop a proposed statewide service delivery model and funding mechanism. The Team is considering a variety of options that will allow school districts to more effectively meet the needs of students.

Those options include:

- Identifying regional host districts;
- Developing a central administration for deaf and hard of hearing education programs and a separate administration of blind and visually impaired education programs;
- Establishing base funding for programs as well as per pupil funding and some type of day and residential program component; and
- Identifying program components that provide professional development for staff, training for parents, materials for students and summer programs for students that may benefit from intensive services.

The details of the delivery model and funding mechanism are yet to be determined but the Board's intent is that the funding model would address facilities, education services, staff, assistive technology and related services in a way that allows for local control in determining students' education programs, and provides state funding for those services.

I would also like to make you aware of the Board's continued effort to obtain feedback from stakeholders. The Board receives written and verbal testimony regarding these issues on a continual basis. Board members read and consider that input when making decisions. In fact, it was through the input received from parents and school administrators throughout the state the Board identified the unmet need for services in areas outside of the Magic Valley and made a commitment to address that need.

The Board will be conducting additional outreach efforts next spring to gather input from all stakeholders who wish to participate. As administrators of education I believe that it will be essential to have your input as we develop these proposals and would encourage your participation.

Board members and Board staff will also be attending regional special education director meetings, superintendent meetings and principal meetings in order to provide information and answer questions about the process and the plan as it is developed.

Finally, the Board has developed a section of our website and a distribution list to provide information regarding this issue. To learn more please see the Board's webpage at <http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov> and click on the Blind/Deaf hotlink. If you have further questions, please contact the Board's Chief Elementary and Secondary officer Christine Ivie at 332-1577.